



Found: Lost Dog by Luddleston

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Summary:

Extremely fluffy, approximately four pounds, will eat all of your cheese and none of your dog treats.

On second thought, may be a human in a dog's body.

Matt is a werewolf, an extremely ferocious beast who just *happens* to look exactly like a Pomeranian. Running away from Sendak's pack has left him injured and weakened, and he's unable to turn back into a human, which leaves him vulnerable to being unwittingly adopted by a handsome man who finds Matt hiding underneath his car.

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Author's Note:

Please just imagine an entire family of Pomeranians fluffing around, cuz that's the Holts in this AU.

Art by [Leo](#) (front and back cover illustrations) and [Chelsea](#) (mid-text illustrations)

Written for the Shatt Big Bang!



The rain came down in sheets, and the gray sky was getting darker by the minute. Matt had been running for god knows how long, unable to tell time by the position of the sun with the cloud cover blanketing the city. He knew he was far from home, and he knew that he'd put the Galra base behind him. That was about it.

Ahead of him was just another block he didn't recognize, another set of street signs that didn't ring any bells. Cars pulled in and out of the gas station to the right, none of them paying him any mind. There was a line of vehicles parked at the meter on the street, not moving any time soon, the ground beneath them only slightly more dry than the rest of the soaked

pavement. Matt had fallen into two puddles already, and even the shallowest were up to his knees when he was in this form.

If it wasn't so cold and wet, Matt would have flopped right over and fallen asleep. Even if he did lay down on the wet pavement, though, his discomfort would keep him awake. Matt examined his reflection in one of the puddles, and a creature that looked like a drowned rat stared back at him. There was mud plastered over his hindquarters from one particularly messy fall, and the only thing Matt could thank the rain for was keeping it from caking in. Dirt was wedged under his nails and between his paw pads, too.

He needed to make it home. He needed to figure out where home was from here, because he was so far away he couldn't even smell it anymore. But he was at a disadvantage, being unable to stop someone and ask them for directions, because he was a six-pound dog without a human vocal range or the height it would take to read a map. Not that he knew where he'd find a map.

He whined, lifting each of his paws for just a second in turn, trying to give them some relief. He'd been on his feet for almost a day, now, running across hard ground, and his paws were painfully sore. He couldn't stop shivering. He whined again, mentally preparing to start searching for a place to spend the night that was drier than the underside of a car.

That was when he heard the footsteps.

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Shiro didn't expect to hear an injured animal whining when he opened the car door to head home after his Target run, so he almost didn't pause, the noise blending in with the background hum of the city. The street was nearly empty so late in the night, and that was what made Shiro stop and look around for the source of the noise. The whining continued from directly below him, so Shiro bent down to peek under his car, one of the knees of his jeans soaking through as he pressed it to the wet pavement.

He couldn't quite see *what* was below his car, but it sounded canine, and it looked very small.

"C'mere," Shiro said, holding out his fingers, and it managed to entreat the animal a couple of steps closer. A couple of steps was only a couple of inches for something that size, though. "It's alright," he continued, "I'm not going to hurt you."

He felt like the animal understood him somehow, though he was sure it was just the soothing tone of voice. It shuffled out from under his car, looking up at him piteously. Definitely a dog, it was wet and bedraggled, fur clumping together with mud and rainwater, ears folded back, paws shifting like it hurt to stand. There was a small scar on its cheek, but it didn't look recent, long-since healed.

"Hey, hey," Shiro said quietly, his hand still extended, and the dog sniffed at his fingertips, then, having seemingly decided Shiro was a trustworthy human, came closer, until it was almost in his lap, its soaked fur getting his jeans even more wet. Shiro picked the dog up and it went willingly, easily, burying itself in his arms, still whining. "It's gonna be alright, little guy," Shiro said, holding the dog in one arm while he shrugged himself out of his hoodie so that he could wrap the dog in it and place it in the passenger seat.

Shiro frowned at the dog for a moment, wondering if he—she? No, he—had ever ridden in a car before, and whether he'd freak out if the answer was no. "Stay still," he said, wrapping the hoodie a little tighter, but the dog didn't seem like he was going anywhere.

Shiro drove slowly anyway, making the fifteen-minute drive almost twenty-five, continually glancing over to check on his passenger. The dog seemed content to bury himself in Shiro's hoodie until only his nose stuck out, and Shiro guessed he was sleeping. He tried to be careful and not wake him as he lifted the bundle out of his passenger seat, but the dog wriggled in his arms anyway, poking his head out to observe his surroundings.

There was a moment of fumbling as Shiro tried to extract his keys from his back pocket and hold onto the dog at the same time, but he managed to get the door open and stepped inside, flicking the lights on.

"We're just gonna get you cleaned up," Shiro said, because even though the dog couldn't understand him, he seemed to be calmed enough by his voice.

Shiro went straight to the bathroom, plopping the animal and the hoodie wrapping him up into the tub, one hand on the dog's head to keep him calm as he pulled his phone out of his jeans pocket, furiously flicking through contacts until he got to Keith. Keith had a dog, he'd know what to do. Even if Keith's dog was some giant mutt and this dog was the kind of miniature something-or-other you could keep in a purse if you wanted to.

Keith answered on the third ring, except it wasn't Keith. "Shiroooo," Lance said, "what's up?"

"Where's Keith?" he asked, fingers scratching behind the dog's ears. He seemed remarkably calm for an animal in a new, confusing place, and Shiro thought perhaps this meant he'd been lost before. Or out on the streets long enough that even a strange person's unfamiliar home was better. He didn't have a collar on.

Shiro could hear Lance hollering for Keith on the other end of the phone, then there was some shuffling, and finally Keith's quiet, "hello?"

"Hey, sorry to call you so late."

Keith responded with a halfhearted, "eh, 's fine," that told Shiro he was definitely interrupting something.

"So, um, I found a dog?"

"You what?"

"He was hiding under my car out in the rain, so, uh, I took him home," Shiro explained, "I just don't know how to... uh... do pretty much anything involving dogs? But he's all wet and sad and I—"

"And you're the kind of person who'd never turn down a sad, wet animal who showed up on your doorstep," Keith said, with the kind of sigh that meant he was rolling his eyes. "Okay, well, you should probably dry him off? Maybe give him a bath? Does it have long fur, or...?"

"Yeah, it looks pretty long," Shiro confirmed, although the dog's fur was still plastered to his body. He'd started shivering, so Shiro plucked him out of the tub and sat him on his lap instead. The dog immediately curled as close to Shiro as possible, just to share his body warmth, but Shiro had to admit it was adorable.

"Yeah, give him a bath, you should be able to just use your soap," Keith said, "since you get that all-natural shit. And you could maybe blow-dry him? You've got one of those, right?"

He was pretty sure he still had the crappy drugstore one Allura had left when she stayed with him that time her house was being renovated. "I think so," he said, already turning on the water and running his fingers through it to test the temperature. "What should I feed him? I don't want to go get dog food and leave him like this..."

The dog's head perked up and he started whining as soon as Shiro proposed the idea of leaving him, so he shushed him gently. "It's okay, buddy, I'm not leaving."

"You can give him just some cooked chicken, or... I dunno, do you even *have* anything edible in your fridge right now?" Keith asked. It was a valid question.

"I have sandwich stuff," Shiro said, "it's just a couple of pieces of deli turkey and I think some cheese, but... he's pretty small."

"Kosmo likes cheese," Keith said, sounding distant, like Lance was doing something in the next room over and Keith was trying to figure out what it was and how annoying it was going to be. "Listen, Shiro, I gotta go—" apparently the answer to that question had been *very*, "—but let me know if anything happens, alright? I'll run by with some of Kosmo's extra food tomorrow and we'll take him to a vet to see if he's microchipped, okay?"

Shiro already found himself desperately hoping he wasn't. "Okay," he agreed, "talk to you later, Keith."

He wasn't really sure he got a goodbye from Keith, because Lance was yelling something indecipherable and loud enough to block out anything Keith might've said. Shiro reached over and shut the tap off, then turned back to the dog in his lap. He'd stopped shivering, and the fur around his face and ears was starting to dry, but it was clumped with mud, so Shiro would have to rinse it out. He unwrapped the hoodie, setting it on the toilet lid so it didn't get residual dirt on his bath mat.

"Let's get you cleaned up," he said, and he could've sworn the dog nodded in agreement. Shiro lifted him out of his lap as slowly and easily as he could manage, waiting for the moment where the dog would panic and start flailing around. It never came, and instead he was completely docile as Shiro placed him into the warm water, his long fur feathering out into the bath.

The dog looked at him expectantly, tilting his head like he was waiting for Shiro to get moving. Huh.

Shiro found that once washed and dried, his furry new friend was basically a ball of fluff. He looked twice as big now, and Shiro was convinced he was half-fluff, half-dog. He certainly looked less pitiful, and like this, his hair covered the scar on his cheek, making it almost unnoticeable. He perked up after the bath, trotting after Shiro on stubby legs as he walked into the kitchen to get some snacks.

Shiro set the dog on the couch next to him while they ate, a fresh towel folded up underneath him. The dog settled himself comfortably and seemed to enjoy the little pieces of turkey, although he was much more interested in the leftover Chinese takeout Shiro was eating.

"You can't have this," Shiro said, "you've got yours right there."

The dog went back to the turkey, but he didn't seem happy about it.

"I should call you something." Shiro thought for a moment. Once he named it, he knew it'd be harder to have to give the dog away if he did belong to somebody, but it was starting to feel strange just referring to him as 'the dog' in his head. "Hmm. What's your name gonna be?"

He said it absently, obviously not expecting an answer, but the dog sat up and gave him one sharp bark, then watched him expectantly, curly little tail wagging back and forth.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Shiro laughed, and the dog just started pawing at him, climbing into his lap, probably another ploy to get some of Shiro's orange chicken. "Hmm. You look like a teddy bear. I should call you Teddy. Or Bear?" He petted behind the dog's ears and he laid down on Shiro's lap, so Shiro could sink his fingers into the longest fur around his shoulders. "Yeah, I think Bear would be nice. Kind of funny, since you're so small."

He didn't get another bark, but Bear rolled onto his back so Shiro could pet his belly, which Shiro took as a good sign. In the back of his head, he repeatedly told himself not to get too attached. The dog looked like he'd been well-groomed before his run-in with the rainstorm, so it was hard to believe he didn't belong to anybody. But Shiro was undoubtedly a dog person, and Bear was *adorable*, so he was hard-pressed not to come up with dream scenarios of having a new best friend. He could get Bear registered as an emotional support animal and they'd let him stay in the apartment building... not to mention, Shiro kind of needed one.

Bear was drifting off, curled into a ball on Shiro's lap, and Shiro figured it was probably time for bed anyways. He lifted Bear up slowly, trying not to wake him, but his eyes blinked open anyway, and he got to his feet, standing on the folded-up towel and watching Shiro toss the take-out container in the garbage. Shiro watched over his shoulder, waiting for the dog to settle down, but it never happened, and he plopped right off the couch and started following him as Shiro made his way toward the bedroom.

"Bud, you can't follow me—that's my room, it's bedtime." He steered Bear back toward the couch, picking him up and placing him on the cushion, patting the towel, moving one of his throw pillows closer to the makeshift bed. "You can sleep here tonight, okay? We'll see about getting you a real bed... well, we'll see."

As soon as Shiro turned, he heard the thump of Bear hopping off the couch again. When Shiro turned, Bear was standing there with his head cocked, taking a few steps closer when Shiro didn't move.

And honestly, it was adorable.

Shiro sighed. "Alright, c'mon, we'll figure something out."

The dog ended up sleeping on Shiro's bed, resting his head on the pillow like a human, and Shiro's chest felt tight, because this must've been how he usually slept with his real owner, right? He ran his fingers through the dog's fur a couple more times, and Bear snuggled a little closer until Shiro pulled the blankets up over the both of them until just Bear's tiny head stuck out.

He swore he heard a contented sigh as the dog finally fell asleep.

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As much as Matt appreciated the hospitality, he had to get out of here. He had to get *home*, to make sure the Galra hadn't tracked down his pack, hadn't found his mom and dad and Pidge. He knew their pack was one of the most established in the area, and he knew the Galra wouldn't dare walk right into their territory. He also knew the rest of the Holts were getting a little cavalier about the borders, not really sticking to their territory, wandering too close to the Galra.

Of course he knew that, it was how he'd gotten caught.

He tried hard to shift, focusing, all his muscles tensing, but, nothing. Still very much a dog. A much more well-rested and cared-for dog, but he was still less than a foot tall and incapable of opening the front door of the apartment he'd been taken to.

Shiro, his name was Shiro, Matt had heard when he was talking on the phone, was a nice guy. A very attractive guy, the kind Matt would have been immensely interested in if he was, you know, human. But, much as everybody joked about leg-humping, that kind of affection from a dog wasn't... normal. The guy was more likely to coo at him like he was a baby

than, well, whatever else Matt would've wanted from a relationship. He tried not to focus on that.

Galra. Pack. Getting home. Right.

He hopped up onto the couch shoved against the window, wondering if that might be a good escape route. Didn't seem like it. There was a screen on the door, and the drop was way too far for a tiny dog.

Part of him didn't want to escape without notice. If he could figure out how, he could at least leave Shiro some kind of message. Shiro seemed like he'd be devastated if he brought home a new pet only to find out his furry friend escaped sometime in the night. But if Matt was going to stick around, and it looked like he would be, there were a number of things that needed to be sorted out. He paced in a circle around the living room while he listed them out in his head.

One: He couldn't use Shiro's bathroom like this without the distinct possibility of falling in the toilet, and although there was a little back patio Shiro could let him out in, Matt thought that was almost as gross as the possibility of falling into the toilet.

Two: He was *not* eating dog food. He knew his diet was more limited in this form, and he couldn't go around eating exactly what he did as a person, but his taste buds still knew that kibble was not for human consumption.

Three: He had to find some way to tell Shiro his name was Matt, not Bear.

Shiro walked out of his bedroom, sleepy-eyed and shirtless, and Matt enjoyed the view. He was already engineering a way to "coincidentally" run into Shiro when he was in human form again.

"G'morning," Shiro said, crouching down to pet him. Matt allowed it. He was, after all, a glutton for affection. "You want breakfast?"

Matt barked enthusiastically, because it was really the only affirmative sound he could make.

"Alright, come with me then, little guy."

He followed Shiro into the kitchen, annoyed that Shiro's chairs were those barstool-type-things that were too tall for him to hop onto. Curse his stubby little legs. He sat in the center of the kitchen instead, waiting on Shiro.

Breakfast was more turkey slices for him, and a protein shake for Shiro, eaten on the couch in his living room while Shiro looked at his phone. Thank god Matt was a small enough dog that he didn't need to eat much, because from the look of things, there wasn't much more than what he was currently gobbling up inside of Shiro's fridge. Shiro petted him absent-mindedly as he drank his shake out of one of those fancy bottles specifically for protein shakes. Matt was starting to think the guy was some kind of jock.

"I don't have any clients today," Shiro said, "but it might be kind of a long day, anyways. Keith's going to come over, so we can get you some actual dog stuff, and we're gonna take a trip to the vet."

Oh, right. There was that. Matt wasn't so worried about it, mentally convincing himself it was gonna be just like being taken to the doctor. Except with the chance that somebody might try to offer him a dog biscuit as a reward for being good. He wasn't sure how to avoid that. Maybe he'd just have to try one. Maybe they wouldn't have small enough ones for a mouth his size. No, that was ridiculous, people actually owned Pomeranians.

Shiro spent the rest of the morning drinking his protein shake and reading an article about canine care. Matt appreciated the effort, but he didn't think many of those tips were gonna help with werewolf care. Matt took a nap, curled into a little ball and pressed up against Shiro's thigh, and Shiro's hand dropped to pet his head, which was sweet, really. It was the kind of thing Matt's mom would've done when he was a kid and he was sick and couldn't fall asleep. Made it easier to drift off, even when he was laying on an unfamiliar couch next to an unfamiliar man, with little idea where, geographically, he even was.

The doorbell rang and Matt's ears perked up, a natural reaction to sudden noise, but he didn't stand or bark, because he wasn't an *animal*. Well. Not completely.

Shiro stood, though, and opened the door for another man. The newcomer was shorter and slighter than Shiro, and had a huge duffel bag slung over one shoulder, which he dropped onto the floor with a thump as soon as he got through the door. This must have been Keith. He regarded Matt, head cocked, confusion written on his face.

"It's so tiny," he said.

"Hey! Don't talk about my dog like that," Shiro said, but he didn't seem truly offended. Matt did a dog equivalent of a frown at Keith, and must have looked particularly pitiful, because Shiro scratched him behind his ears again to soothe him.

"He's not your dog," Keith pointed out. "We still need to take him to a vet."

The hand in Matt's fur slowed its movements, and Shiro sighed. "You're probably right. He seems relatively tame, so he probably belongs to somebody, I just..."

Should Matt have started running around like a wild animal more, so he didn't seem like he belonged to anybody? Because he sure as hell didn't. He just about stood up and started barking, but he was distracted by Keith plopping his bag onto the coffee table and unzipping it.

"Okay, so, I brought some of Kosmo's food," he said, taking out a tupperware container full of dog food. "But, uh, one of these pieces is like, the size of his whole mouth." Next out of the bag was an open box of dog biscuits. Shiro took one out and broke off a piece, trying to offer it to Matt, who decided that nope, he wasn't gonna try eating that. Listen, he'd eaten some weird stuff in his time. He'd been the kid in middle school who would mix together the weirdest combinations of whatever the cafeteria was offering, just to impress other people with more discerning palettes.

And okay, he'd eaten some questionable stuff in college, too, but there was a difference between 1AM tacos from the sketchy place next door to the bar and literal dog food. He shuffled away, until it wasn't right in front of his nose anymore. The box advertised them as being peanut-butter flavored, but it didn't smell like peanut butter at all. Matt would rather they try to feed him actual peanut butter.

"He won't eat it," Shiro said, frowning, looking kind of concerned. Matt supposed it was a little concerning that a dog wouldn't eat a dog biscuit.

"He'd probably spoiled," Keith said, "little purse dog thing."

This time, Matt did yap at him a couple times, and it made Keith recoil and Shiro laugh. "I don't think he likes you calling him spoiled!" Shiro didn't know how right he was. Spoiled. Keith wouldn't wanna eat a dog bone, either.

"Okay, well, I also brought your *spoiled* dog a water bowl," Keith said, and Shiro immediately went about filling that up. This, Matt did appreciate, because the bowl Shiro had been trying to give him water in was just a little too tall for comfort. As Matt drank, Keith also emptied a collar and a leash out of the bag, both too large and unnecessary. Even from across the room, Matt could tell they smelled like another dog, must've been whatever enormous mutt Keith owned. The collar had spikes.

"I really don't think Kosmo's stuff is gonna work for him," Shiro said.

"Okay, well, I didn't realize exactly how small 'I found a small dog' was. It's not my fault you found a tiny Pomeranian."

"No, but it is your fault for owning a dog whose granddad was a wolf."

Keith also had a worn knitted blanket in the bottom of the bag, which smelled even more like other-dog. "I, uh, I also brought one of Kosmo's blankets, so that he can smell it, and then maybe we can introduce them, if you end up keeping it."

"Do you think that's a good idea?" Shiro asked. Matt trotted back across the other room and Keith extended the corner of the blanket for him to sniff. He actually wanted Keith to set it down, because it looked kind of cozy, and Matt may have gotten a good night's sleep, but he'd been running non-stop for a few days before that and he was still exhausted.

"Kosmo's well-trained," Keith said with a shrug. "Even if he *could* eat your little ball of fluff like a piece of cotton candy, he won't."

Ridiculous. Matt was a fucking werewolf. A ferocious, tough werewolf! Granted, when he was this low on energy he was more of a were-dog, but still! He could handle himself. If he hadn't gotten eaten by Galra, he wouldn't get eaten by Keith's dog.

"So. What's the number for Kosmo's vet?" Shiro asked.

Matt laid down and started whining like he knew just what 'vet' meant. Because he did. And it wasn't gonna be good.

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Keith drove them to the vet so that Shiro could sit Matt on his lap. Matt could have ridden in the back seat just fine. He was also very cool with the fact that he was in Shiro's lap.

Shiro fretted over the fact that they didn't have a leash or collar for him, and Keith told him to stop worrying, because Matt seemed like a chill enough dog that he wouldn't need to be leashed inside the building at the vet. And Shiro would carry him between the building and the car, so it was fine. Matt was glad, because he would have been kind of pissed if they tried to put him on a leash.

The waiting room at the vet had pictures of golden retriever puppies and tabby kittens on the walls. Everything was beige, from the paint on the walls to the cushions on the chairs to the laminate flooring. Overall, the place looked like it hadn't been updated since 2002. The woman behind the desk sounded nice when Keith approached to check them in, though. She was wearing scrubs printed with dog bones.

Matt had never been in a vet's office before. His family had never really owned any pets, because being dogs themselves half the time, it made things weird. He hadn't been in an actual doctor's office in a long time, either, as adult werewolves tended to be healthy overall, and had extremely capable immune systems.

Shiro took a seat next to a woman holding a cat carrier that was hissing intermittently. It was either an angry cat or an unorthodox method of transporting a snake. Other than her, the only people in the vet's office were Shiro, Keith, and a woman holding onto the leash of a very excited German Shepherd puppy that was thrilled to see Matt. Most animals could tell there was something up with Matt, that he wasn't one of them, but this one was too young, and probably just wanted to sniff his butt or something. Matt solved the problem by burying himself into Shiro's arms, which made Shiro pet him gently and coo too him about how everything was going to be okay, and this was just a check-up.

The hissing cat-carrier lady was called back first, but they were called shortly after, by the name 'Bear,' which Matt had almost forgotten Shiro had decided to call him. Oh, shit. This was it.

The exam room was not beige, but plain white, and had posters detailing all the medical conditions your dog or cat could have that you could read about and stress yourself out about while you waited. Great. The woman in the dog-bone scrubs, who was the veterinary assistant, put Matt on the exam table, where he shifted around nervously, trying to decide between hiding and making this drag on forever, and just getting it over with.

He went with the latter.

They examined him, and he wasn't happy with it, but he put up with it, mentally repeating that it was just a regular doctor's appointment that he happened to be in dog form for. And there was a strange man and a slightly-more-familiar man sitting in the exam room. Right.

The vet and her assistant informed Shiro that Matt was not microchipped, and there was a visible look of relief on his face. They also informed Shiro

that Matt was not neutered, and if anyone was intending on changing that, Matt was going to have to bite some fingers off.

It was, overall, less humiliating than he was imagining, just a lot of looking in his mouth and at his eyes and normal doctor stuff. There was the thermometer thing, and that had Matt completely certain he was never gonna let Pidge learn about this. If she did, he'd never live it down.

The vet did try and offer him more dog biscuits, which he turned down as politely as he could to keep Keith from calling him spoiled again. It didn't work, Keith informed the vet that Matt was spoiled, anyway.

Matt grumbled at Keith again, and it made Shiro laugh and step closer, so he could pet Matt's head to calm him. The vet told Shiro it was okay for him to give Matt bits of cheese or carrots as treats, which Matt appreciated, because those were actual food. He could survive on begging those off Shiro until he could find a way out of here.

Hmm. What was his way out of here, again?

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Bear fell asleep in the car on the way home, lying calmly in the back seat instead of hopping up and trying to look out the window. He must have been used to riding in the car, and it wasn't much of a novelty anymore.

Keith kept telling Shiro he had a weird dog. Shiro thought he had a perfectly good dog, but he had to admit, there was something strange about him. For one, Bear didn't try to jump out of the car as soon as Shiro opened the door when they parked outside the pet store. Instead, he waited for Shiro to lift him out, like he knew Shiro's Highlander sat too high for him to hop out of without hurting himself. There was a woman with a corgi on a leash crossing the parking lot, but Shiro's dog made no effort to bark back at it, or even give it the time of day.

"Maybe you should bring Kosmo over," Shiro said, "get him socialized with another dog or something."

"I'm getting less and less sure Kosmo wouldn't eat him." Keith appeared to be in the middle of a staring contest with the Pomeranian. "He's like an oversized cotton ball."

Shiro couldn't deny that. He had Bear tucked under his arm as they walked through the sliding glass doors and into PetSmart, and he certainly felt like an oversized cotton ball.

Bear continued to ignore every other animal walking around the store, although he did quirk his head at the iguana on a leash and spent a lot of time observing that whole situation. He sat in the front seat of the cart, the part that was intended for small children, and behaved better than a small child would have. Keith retrieved a small bag of dog food, which Bear looked particularly disdainful about. Shiro thought he would've been happy about the food, but maybe he was used to a fancy brand or something.

"He'll eat it eventually," Keith said, "he's just getting used to stuff." Down at the end of the aisle, there was an Italian greyhound hopping around and yapping because its owner was holding a bag of treats. Bear didn't pay them any mind. Shiro started to agree that his dog was sort of weird.

He showed Bear different toys, hoping to entice him with one of them, and Bear continued to glare at any rawhide toys, bones, or rubber balls. Shiro eventually found him a small plush hedgehog, and Bear wagged his tail before accepting the toy, holding it gently in his mouth for the remainder of their trip through the pet store. They passed a woman holding the leashes of four golden retriever puppies, two in each hand, and they finally interested Bear, but he didn't bark at them, just looked at them with a shine in his eyes like he was smiling.

Shiro ended up on the other side of the checkout lane out way too much money and plus way too much pet stuff. He had a tiny dog bed covered in paw prints to set up for Bear later, plus the hedgehog toy, a bright green collar and leash, some food and water dishes, and the food and treats that Bear didn't seem to like. He hadn't seemed too perturbed by the tiny, peanut-butter flavored crunchy treats, so Shiro gave him one, but he only held it in his mouth long enough to spit it out on the sidewalk as soon as they left the store.

Yeah, he had a weird dog.

Keith gave him whatever other dog advice he could come up with (most of which wasn't entirely helpful), then told him to just Google whatever he couldn't figure out. He left Shiro sitting on his living room floor, staring at his dog, trying to figure out what he should do next. Should they go for a walk? Bear darted out of the way when Shiro tried to clip the leash to his collar, like he didn't know what it was, or like he was afraid of it. Honestly, Shiro thought, he wasn't too worried about letting Bear walk alongside him without a leash. He was extremely well-behaved, and small enough that Shiro could catch him and lift him up if he started misbehaving.

He thought he'd better start with letting the dog explore his backyard. It was tiny, so there wasn't much to explore, just a ton of potted plants and a two-foot strip of grass, one cabinet where Shiro kept his gardening supplies shoved against the outer wall of the house. He watched while Bear wandered around, hoping he was potty trained. He had to be, right?

Bear lifted one leg and glared at Shiro until he turned away from the sliding back door, like he wanted some privacy.

He let Bear back in as he started making something to eat, even though it was too late for lunch and too early for dinner. He'd decided to go to bed early that night, though, so he figured it didn't matter if he was eating dinner at four in the afternoon like an old person. He poured out a bowl of food for Bear, too, but he ignored it entirely, watching Shiro cook instead.

Well. If it could be called cooking. Shiro was pretty sure heating up frozen veggie burger patties in a pan and sticking them between two slices of toast was the bare minimum of what cooking entailed, but it was about all Shiro could manage at his skill level.

Bear stared at his food so longingly Shiro made a third veggie burger and sat it on a plate on the floor, because apparently this dog was used to a diet of human food. This stuff wasn't bad for dogs, right? Shiro stared at the ingredients list on the back of the box. It was all organic and stuff. It was probably fine. Bear seemed to like it, after all.

Halfway through dinner, which Shiro ate on the couch while watching a documentary he was pretty sure he'd already seen, Bear's head lifted and he started barking, a series of short, sharp yaps. Shiro found him pressed against the tall window next to the front door, probably because it was the only one Bear could see out of, and Shiro peered out, trying to determine the source of his outburst.

There was another dog across the street. It was a big, shaggy, black beast of an animal, the fur around its back and chest particularly thick and a sort of silvery gray. Shiro had a suspicion it was some kind of wolf hybrid, because it sort of looked like Kosmo (even though Keith denied Kosmo having any kind of mixed heritage).

Bear continued to bark at the dog, who was staring at the house like it could hear the tiny pomeranian yapping its head off inside. There was no way. Shiro scooped Bear up into his arms instead, carrying him back to the couch.

"It's fine, bud," he said, setting him down on the cushion.

Bear hopped right off and ran over to the window again, barking his way over until he looked out the window and realized that the other dog wasn't there. Then, seemingly satisfied, he trotted back over to Shiro's side, looking proud of himself for scaring off the big neighbor dog.

Though, Shiro wasn't sure which of his neighbors owned a dog like that looked like it could devour a small child.



— — —

Matt needed to get out of here. The Galra were already on his trail, and if he stayed here, he'd lead them straight to Shiro. Shiro, who had only been kind and gracious toward a stray he'd picked up, who deserved a bunch of bloodthirsty monsters on his tail less than anyone else in the world. Matt couldn't let him deal with that.

And so he determined that tonight, he would hop out of the bed and head out the door, maybe engineer some kind of story about a lost dog being found that could show up on Shiro's Twitter feed. That way Shiro wouldn't feel so terrible about it. It wasn't a great plan, but it was all he had.

That night, although Shiro plopped Matt down onto the bed next to him, Matt didn't curl up and go to sleep right away, remaining awake and alert so that he could carefully sneak away in the night. Like a ninja. Or like a very small werewolf.

He kept himself up by eagerly imagining all the things he was gonna do once he had opposable thumbs again, but just as he was in the middle of his list (somewhere between "driving a car" and "posting a bunch of stuff on Instagram") he noticed Shiro curl in on himself a bit more, his breathing turning shallow. Matt froze for just a second. Was Shiro awake? But no, he rolled over to face Matt, his fingers curled into the pillow, clutching it tight to his face as he made a pitifully sad noise in his throat.

He was having a nightmare. Matt hesitated. Now would be the time to leave—but then Shiro would wake up from a nightmare to find his dog gone and he'd be alone and... No, Matt couldn't just leave. He took a few steps closer to Shiro and nosed at his arm, but Shiro slept right through it. He made another frightened sound, like a little gasp, and then his entire body was shaking, shivering like the room had turned freezing cold.

Matt pushed his head against Shiro's arm again, more insistent, trying to wake him, but Shiro remained unresponsive, and Matt started to panic. Shiro was still shaking, and now there were visible tears trailing from the corners of his eyes. Matt had to wake him up.

He took as deep a breath as his tiny lungs would allow and barked as loud as he dared. He didn't want to scare Shiro, but waking him would be impossible unless Matt started to make some noise.

Shiro did not wake immediately, but he did stir, and then opened his eyes. He was no longer shaking but he was still breathing too hard, and Matt ducked closer to him to lick his palm, pushing his wet nose into Shiro's skin. He would have jumped up to lick his face, as well, but he thought he'd feel weird about that later.

Shiro's gasping breaths slowed, and he petted Matt's head with a hand that still trembled. He groaned and shook his head as if to clear it, reaching up to wipe at his eyes and pinch the bridge of his nose. "Ugh. Thanks, Bear," he

said, dropping his hand to stroke Matt's head again, thumb rubbing at his ears. "I'm sorry, did I wake you up?" He spoke as though he was talking to a human roommate or something, and Matt didn't have much to reply with.

In lieu of words, he tucked himself closer to Shiro's side and sat down resolutely. His plan was being delayed for an hour, and sure, it wasn't that big a deal, but the little kernel of guilt that had been sitting in the pit of his stomach started to grow into something decidedly uncomfortable.

"It's just a nightmare," Shiro said, as though Matt was the one who needed comforting. "It's okay, they just kind of... happen, sometimes, since I got back from deployment." He paused for a moment, and then sighed. "Why am I telling you this? I should just go back to sleep."

Okay, yeah, that guilt was full-blown painful now. This guy really need a therapy dog. But Matt couldn't just hang out being a therapy dog for a sweet veteran that was, admittedly, a super good dog owner so far. He struggled to find a way around things that didn't involve him explaining the whole werewolf thing to Shiro while Shiro got up and got himself a glass of water from the kitchen. He came up with a big blank.

It wouldn't be the first time Matt told somebody he was a werewolf. He'd admitted to it only on three occasions, and it had never gone well. Maybe this time, it wouldn't be so bad. Maybe Shiro would be just as tolerant and graceful with that discovery as he had been with the realization that there was a dog hiding under his car.

The idea of telling him insinuated itself into Matt's mind, the way he would react playing across his dreams. The disbelief, the panic, the small, small possibility of acceptance.

Matt didn't realize quite how attached to the idea he had become until the next morning, because while it was true that young werewolves couldn't always control their transformations, it had been a while since Matt had experienced something quite like... this.

— — —

Shiro woke up warm, still clinging to the edges of the benign dream that had replaced his nightmares. The curtains weren't entirely closed, so a strip of light crossed the bed, coming dangerously close to being right in his eyes. Shiro pressed his face further into the pillow, yawning and scratching his cheek. He needed to shave. He needed to get up. It was his day off, but he had to do... something. Hm. What had that been? Shiro pressed closer into the warmth next to him as he thought, listening to slow breathing next to his head.

Oh, right, the dog was there.

Except, when Shiro rubbed his eyes as he finally opened them, his field of vision was full of golden-brown hair, and then a handsome, very *human* face. What the hell?

The man still sleeping obliviously next to Shiro looked about his age, with long, shaggy hair that fell to his shoulders. He looked almost angelic, the morning light turning his skin golden, illuminating traces of summer freckles on his cheekbones and shoulders. One of his hands was curled against the left side of his face, propping his head up on the pillow, and his other was between them, brushing against Shiro's chest.

He was also shirtless, the blankets pulled up too high for Shiro to see whether he had anything else on.

Honestly, that'd be the least of his worries, except, okay, the guy was very attractive and Shiro, who was convinced at this point that he was still dreaming, couldn't stop thinking about it.

But seriously, *what the fuck was happening.*

Shiro glanced around the room. From what he could see, the dog seemed to have vanished, apparently having been replaced by this man. No, that was ridiculous. Shiro leaned over to check his phone to make sure he hadn't missed a text from somebody about letting a random guy stay at his place for the night—maybe Lance tried to make him a dating site profile again? He had nothing but his blank lock screen and the time across the front

labeling it as seven-thirty in the morning. If Shiro didn't have a stranger occupying his bed, he would've gone back to sleep.

What was the social protocol for this kind of thing? Was he supposed to wake him up? Was he supposed to just let him sleep and make breakfast? He didn't have any breakfast food, so that last bit was out.

While Shiro was busy panicking about etiquette, he felt a leg brush his under the blankets. Shiro was just wearing a pair of old basketball shorts, so it wasn't hard to tell that the leg was bare. He was now one step closer to pretty damn sure his bedmate was nude.

He cleared his throat softly, and the guy snored right through it. He did it again, to the same effect. Then, he tapped him on the shoulder and finally got a response, eyes crinkling, hand reaching up to wipe the sleep from them.

"Pidge, g'away," he muttered, shoving at Shiro's hand.

Shiro didn't know what a Pidge was, but it wasn't an answer to the question "why are you in my bed," so he gave his uninvited houseguest another pat on the shoulder, fingers prodding a little harder this time.

The man in Shiro's bed finally opened his eyes, and Shiro was thrown for a second, because they were the warmest brown he'd ever seen, almost amber. "Um," Shiro began, "I went to sleep with a dog in my bed? And, uh. You're not a dog."

He glanced down at himself and then back up. "I mean, not currently," he said, which was *not* the answer Shiro was expecting. He scrambled back, sitting up cross-legged, and the man mirrored him, and okay, yeah, he was definitely naked under there. He managed to pull the blankets up before Shiro saw much of anything, but Shiro flushed and looked determinedly away anyways.

"What the hell do you *mean*?"

He got a withering sigh in response. "You won't believe me."

"Yeah, well, I wasn't really expecting a normal answer to *why did I wake up with you in my bed?*" Shiro clenched his own fingers in his hair, rumpling it up even more. His heart was racing, in the off-beat kind of way that led to flashbacks and anxiety attacks and a whole host of symptoms Shiro tried to forget he had. He breathed as slow as he could manage, closing his eyes and trying to ignore the problem sitting right in front of him, hoping that when he opened them, there'd just be a small dog on his bedsheets.

Nope. Still a naked man.

A naked man who now looked deeply concerned. "Are you okay?" he asked, "your heartbeat just sped up like crazy, you kind of... you kind of look like you're going to have a panic attack? Are you?"

It was a very real possibility. "No," Shiro said, but it didn't come out very convincing. He wasn't even gonna ask how the guy knew the thing about his heartbeat. He could probably see the pulse in his neck or something. "Well, probably not. I'm fine, okay, just. Shoot. Explain."

"Well, first off, my name's Matt, not Bear," he said, sticking a hand out to introduce himself, and then dropping it, because, yeah, this wasn't really the time for pleasantries. Also, Shiro's right arm was lying a foot away on the nightstand.

Upon closer inspection, Matt didn't seem to be doing so great. His torso, now bared because the blankets had fallen to his waist, was covered in mottled bruising, most of it only a couple of days old, by the look of things. He had bruises under his eyes, too, but those were probably just from a lack of rest. His hair was also a *mess*, but Shiro was sure he had his own bedhead situation, so he couldn't judge.

When Matt moved some of his mass of hair back over his shoulder and turned to face him more fully, Shiro noticed the strangest thing about him. A scar, small and pink and long-since healed, in a familiar place on his cheek. Come to think of it, his hair was the exact same color as the little dog's fur had been. Shiro craned his head to glance out the open doorway and down the hall. Where was the dog?"

Matt, who seemed to have collected himself, finally spoke. "Okay, so, I'm what you might call a, uh. Werewolf." He let the word hang there, but not long enough for Shiro to respond. "I'm, y'know, obviously not an actual wolf, I turn into a dog—I look like a Pomeranian? Most of the time, anyway. I can do a big, kinda wolf-y form, too. Well, so, okay, I got kind of hurt, and since the dog form takes less energy—I mean, you saw how little I was, right? Well, I kind of got stuck like that until I recovered... which, honestly, may not have happened if you didn't pick me up, so. I guess what I'm trying to say is, thank you?"

Shiro's teeth clicked together as he shut his mouth after realizing it'd been hanging open. "I don't believe this," he said, and Matt just shrugged.

"I am what I am," he said, which sounded much more ominous because it was followed by golden, unearthly light surrounding his entire body. It was almost blinding and lasted about half a second, and then Bear—or, Small Matt, was sitting on his sheets, wagging up at him.

"Holy shit." Shiro was suddenly lightheaded, and certain that if he stood up, he'd faint. "Uh. Okay. Okay, you're, um. Definitely a werewolf."

Matt barked once, like he was agreeing, and then nosed his way back under the covers. For a second, Shiro thought he was going to go right back to sleep, but he transformed again, back to human form, the blankets wrapped around him like a giant shawl.

"So, you convinced?" he asked, and seemed to take the look on Shiro's paper-white face as a yes. "Sorry, I wasn't planning on turning back into a human, I was gonna just sneak out as a dog, but I... that got complicated."

Shiro was suddenly kind of glad Matt had revealed his little secret, because he'd be crushed if his new dog managed to escape on him. Knowing that he'd accidentally brought home a mythical creature was somehow better. Shiro started to question some things.

"So, um. I'd get up and leave, but. I'm naked?"

"Oh! You can borrow some clothes, let me grab something," Shiro said, but the end of his sentence was drowned out by Matt's stomach growling loud enough to wake the dead. "And I guess we'll also get you some breakfast."

Shiro ended up making Matt a can of chicken soup he had in his cupboard, because of the lack of breakfast food, but Matt seemed happy either way, seated on the couch next to him, tipping the giant soup mug up to his lips to drink most of it as fast as he could.

Shiro had learned bits and pieces about Matt in the short time Matt had been in human form. One, he seemed suspicious about something outside, and kept peering out the windows. Two, the scar on his cheek wasn't the only one. When Matt walked back into the room in one of Shiro's old college sweatshirts, pushing the sleeves up to his elbows, he noticed jagged, ropy scars covering Matt's arms, like claw marks. Like something had tried to hold him, and it had something far nastier than human fingernails.

Three, Matt was slighter than he looked and he was absolutely swimming in Shiro's borrowed clothes, and it was sort of adorable.

Now, Matt was seated on the couch, his legs folded up under himself, still drinking his soup with messy slurping noises that should've been extremely unattractive. Should have.

After Matt finished eating, he wandered around the house, marveling at all of the things he could finally do now that he had thumbs. He kept having to tug up the waistband of the shorts he'd borrowed, because he was significantly thinner than Shiro, and could probably have fit in Keith's clothing easier. Shiro tried not to stare too much, but hoped that the way his eyes followed Matt around the room could be interpreted as bafflement with the whole werewolf situation.

In actuality, Matt didn't seem to notice at all. He was busy closing every curtain in the house even though it was perfectly pleasant outside, fumbling with the blinds in Shiro's kitchen.

"What... what are you doing?" Shiro asked.

"Making sure nobody can see in," Matt replied, and Shiro, suddenly very concerned that a relative stranger was doing that inside of his house, backed up until he could peek out the living room curtains without Matt noticing. The street looked ordinary, except for the dog standing in a neighbor's yard, looking directly at Shiro. It was the same enormous black beast he'd seen Bear—no, he'd seen *Matt* barking at the day before, and Shiro tugged the curtain closed again. Maybe making sure nobody could see in was a good idea.

Shiro sat down unnecessarily heavily, but he figured he was allowed some level of shock. He sort of missed the idea of having a dog to pet when he was freaked out by this. Matt's hair still looked very pettable, but Shiro tried not to think about that.

Matt took a seat on the armchair across from Shiro, kicking his feet onto the coffee table. One of his toenails looked like it was broken, like he'd dropped something heavy on his foot, or maybe kicked something he shouldn't have. "So. As you may have intuited, I'm not the only werewolf in the whole world."

Shiro hadn't been thinking much about that, because he was still trying to get past the concept of his *pet dog* being a werewolf. "Right," he said, anyway.

"It's mostly hereditary, by the way," Matt said, "so I didn't get bitten by a werewolf, or anything. That does happen, it's just..." he shook his head. "Never mind. My whole family is full of werewolves, that's the point."

"Are they all... so, uh. Small?"

"Oh yeah, it's adorable as hell."

Shiro did imagine that a large group of Pomeranians hanging out would be pretty cute. Especially if they were all as adorable as Matt's dog form was. "Okay, so... what's with the giant black dog, then? Is it... one of you?"

"Yeah, sort of." Matt sighed. "You gotta understand, werewolves are about as genetically diverse as dogs are, and so there are some of us that are more

closely related to actual wolves than others. The ones that are more wolf-y tend to be kind of... feral? Is that the right word? That seems kind of demeaning. They're just... they're sorta territorial, and also sorta murder...y."

"That doesn't sound good." That was an understatement. There was a territorial, "murder-y" werewolf hanging around his neighborhood. Shiro felt sort of faint.

"They're called Galra, that's their pack," Matt said. "They actually have a pack structure still, it's really rigid, not even like what actual wolves do—sidenote, alpha wolves aren't a real thing, did you know that?"

"Uh."

"Never mind." Matt looked at the window, which remained closed. "That's why I was wandering around the street when you found me," he said. "The Galra had been chasing me for days, and I was so worn out, I couldn't even shift into human form, and, let's be real, I probably would have died if you didn't come around. So, thank you. Again."

"No problem." Shiro was still sort of lightheaded and he thought it was obvious in his voice.

"Yeah, well, it's kind of a problem. On your end, at least. Because now there's at least two Galra wandering around your house, trying to find me, and that puts you in danger—not like I'm trying to freak you out!" Matt held his hands up, as though Shiro needed placated. Shiro probably looked as though he did.

He couldn't help but look out the curtain again. The dog was still there, still staring directly at the house. And Matt had said there were at least two, so it meant either the dog he had seen the day before was a different werewolf, or there was another out there that Shiro had missed. "What do we do?" he asked, not proud of the way his voice shook.

"Well, first of all, I hope to god you don't have like, work or shit, because we need to lie low," Matt said. "And second of all, I need to call my mom."

— — —

Shiro let Matt borrow his phone, and Matt almost forgot how to press buttons right, having been a dog so long. He swore that hadn't happened since the week in the eighth grade he tried to get out of having to go to school by shifting into a dog the entire time and refusing to turn back. Mom had been pissed.

She wasn't that angry this time, which surprised Matt, because the disappearing act was normally met with some kind of fury overlaying all the concern. But word of the Galra threat must have worked its way back to the Holts, and so as soon as his mom picked up the phone, she was shouting for the rest of the family to come talk to Matt. It was a lot of questions layered over other people's questions, and Matt did his best to answer.

Where are you?

Are you alright?

Whose phone is this?

Who's Shiro?

Matt, did you meet a BOY?

"No, Pidge!" Matt yelped into the phone. Shiro gave him a sideways look. He was standing in the kitchen, making himself a salad, because it was about lunchtime. Apparently, explaining werewolves took a while. Matt wasn't going to eat more of Shiro's food, both because he didn't think there was much in Shiro's refrigerator at all, and he'd eaten an entire bowl of soup for breakfast.

"Listen." Matt rubbed at the bridge of his nose. "I need you guys to come get me, because there's at least two Galra wandering around outside his house—yes, big ones, are there even small ones?" Shiro continued to watch Matt as he paced around the living room, combing his fingers through his hair, trying to work it into some semblance of decency.

Not that there was anyone for Matt to look decent for. Shiro had already seen him looking like a complete mess when he woke up that morning—although Matt supposed Shiro had probably been more distracted by a naked man magically appearing in his bed than whatever Matt's hair looked like.

But Matt had to admit, Shiro was even more attractive when viewed from the eye level of a human. Being in a Pomeranian's body meant Matt was constantly seeing everyone from double-chin angle.

"Okay, I'll see you then. Can you bring my phone? And also my sneakers. And maybe like, some regular clothes—*Katie, I'm not naked!*"

Shiro had stopped chopping up cucumbers so he could laugh, hiding his face behind one hand. Matt could still see his shoulders shaking, though. "Shut up," he said, and Shiro stopped, even though Matt was talking to Pidge, who was asking if she should bring Matt's boxers with the pink sharks on them. Matt hung up on her.

"So, your... someone's coming to get you?" he asked.

"Yeah, my little sister's driving my car over," he said. He fiddled with his hair some more. Should've asked Pidge to bring him a hairbrush. "So, this might be a weird thing to ask."

"I think we're past weird," Shiro said, back to cutting up vegetables.

"Okay, good. That's a good place to be. I think." Matt took a seat at the barstool that was pushed up against the counter separating Shiro's kitchen from the living/dining area. "So, can I give you my number? Just because, y'know, the Galra are still out there, and. Uh. I don't want you getting eaten by evil werewolves."

Shiro's eyes were just as wide as they'd been when he woke up next to Matt that morning. "They *eat* people?"

"Okay, that might have been a hyperbole. But. Still."

Shiro ducked his head and smiled, focusing very intently on his salad-making and not looking Matt directly in the eyes. "Yeah, I'll give you my number," he said. "You know, you could've just asked."

"I... I could?"

"Yeah. I mean, normally this bit happens *before* I wake up next to a guy in my bed, but."

Matt nearly fell off the barstool. "Are you *flirting* with me?"

"Is that a weird thing to do when you adopt a dog and then it turns out to be a man?" Shiro was sorting through his fridge for... something. Matt had stopped paying attention to his food prep situation.

"Probably. But again, we're past weird."

Shiro smiled at him, and it was the softest look he'd given him since he'd stopped being a dog. Matt tried hard to keep his heart from fluttering, because his goal right now was to keep Shiro from getting killed by Galra, but when a guy like *that* was looking at him like *this*, well. The heart fluttering was next to impossible to stop.

— — —

It was only after Matt left that Shiro got hit with how *absolutely insane* this all was. Werewolves. What the actual hell. Shiro had to take a minute to sit on his couch and stare at a blank spot on his wall and go over the morning's events a couple of times to determine whether it had actually happened or he was losing his mind. If he was honest, he was leaning more toward losing his mind.

Matt's sister had pulled into Shiro's driveway in a bright orange Jeep about an hour ago, and Matt had given Shiro a rib-crushing hug before running out the door and leaping into the driver's seat on top of his sister, loudly arguing that he should drive, because it was *his car*, and he'd been stuck as a dog for like four days. Shiro didn't wait to see whether Matt's sister let him

drive the car home, because something in him turned mournful at the idea that he was watching Matt leave.

And now, he was on the couch.

His lunch sat untouched on the counter, because eating was further down on the hierarchy of needs when Shiro was trying to figure out how to explain to Keith what happened with his dog. Should he just say Bear's family came and took him home? That was technically the truth.

How was he supposed to be normal after this? How was he supposed to just go to work and act like—oh, shit, he had to go to work. Shiro checked the time on his phone, realized he had about five minutes to eat lunch and get ready to go, and made the hastiest exit possible from his front door, flinging his bag into the passenger seat and peeling out of the driveway at faster than advisable speeds. He didn't notice the giant black dog still watching his house, a few feet closer this time.

Shiro was only two minutes late to work, which he counted as a success, considering the morning he'd had. He was glad to have something to distract himself with, but by the time he got home that night, he was back to trying to figure out where, evolutionarily, werewolves would even *come* from. Shiro wasn't quite ready to accept the existence of magic, so he was determined that there had to be a natural explanation for this. Somewhere.

His phone buzzed twice and he turned it over to look at the screen as he dropped his bag by the front door. The first text was from Keith, *sorry you couldn't keep the dog*, in response to Shiro's message about Bear's owners finding him. Keith was a good friend; he wouldn't ask things like how the dog's owners actually managed to track him down.

The second was from an unknown number, and simply read *you doing alright man?*

It only took Shiro a couple seconds of racking his brain to realize that the text must have been from Matt. His theory was confirmed by the message that followed about half a second later: *oh shit right this is matt sorry*.

Shiro typed out and deleted about four different versions of *I'm okay* before finally sending something to Matt. Then, he set his phone on the coffee table, heading to the kitchen to see if he had anything edible around. He found some of those gluten free sesame chips he was addicted to hiding in the cabinet where he'd managed not to eat them yet, and he opened the bag, not bothering to grab a bowl.

Shiro meant to head back to the living room and sit down in front of the TV for a while—he had a season of that show Keith liked to catch up on—but he stopped dead in his tracks when he looked out his back door.

The motion sensor on the backyard floodlight had come on, and Shiro could see a pair of yellow eyes reflected in the light. And then he could see another pair. And another.

He grabbed his phone and ran for the bedroom.

— — —

Not ten minutes after Matt got a text from Shiro that simply read *I'm fine* with nothing else to keep a conversation going, his phone rang, Shiro's name displayed on the screen.

Matt picked up, because of course he was gonna pick up, the hottest guy he'd met in years was calling him, and it was almost getting late enough to be a booty call. Okay, Matt didn't actually believe Shiro would call him for that. When people knew he was a werewolf, they usually got weird about the dating and romance stuff anyway, expecting Matt to have some kind of... wolfy situation down there. Ridiculous.

All he got out was a, "hey?" before Shiro's voice came through the mic, frantic and hushed.

"*Matt!* Matt, listen, I might be freaking out about something useless, but there's all these eyes outside my back door, and I'm thinking they *could* be deer, but I heard howling, and—"

"Yeah, I got you," Matt said, already snatching his keys off his dresser, balancing his phone between his cheek and his shoulder as he yanked on his sneakers. "That sounds like trouble. I'll be over in like twenty minutes, okay, just go somewhere with no windows and lock yourself in."

"Should I... I don't know. Call Animal Control?"

Matt thought for a moment. There was very little a bunch of humans could do against a pack of Galra, but the truck showing up might scare them off. The Galra were violent beasts, sure, but they were smart enough not to get caught. Then again, Matt was pretty damn sure Animal Control wouldn't believe there was an actual pack of wolves in a residential neighborhood.

"I'll get there faster than they will. Just hang on, okay?"

He could hear Shiro's shaky sigh over the sound of his car turning on. "Okay."

Matt sped through two yellow lights, one red light, and a half a dozen stop signs on the way to Shiro's house, pulling his Jeep crookedly into the driveway behind Shiro's car.

"SHIRO!" he called, his phone pressed against his ear, ringing as he tried to call Shiro's number at the same time. The front door was locked, and Matt hunted around for some kind of fake rock or something that would hold a spare key, before he realized the back door would be way easier to break into.

He scanned the yard for any sign of Galra. No movement, but there were tracks through the grass leading up to Shiro's house. Shit. The back door was already open.

The living room was empty. The coffee table was tilted sideways as though someone had run into it, and there was a bag of chips sitting on the floor, the contents scattered across the kitchen. Matt ran for Shiro's bedroom, the only place he'd be likely to barricade himself, and threw the door open, to find the room an absolute mess. There was a lamp on the floor, and a dent in the wall that hadn't been there before. The books that had been lined up

on Shiro's dresser were now strewn across its surface and onto the carpet below, laying half-open atop one another.

It was the Galra.

They took him.

Matt could repeat, "no, no, no, no," as much as he wanted, but it didn't change the contents of the sheet of paper lying on Shiro's bed, obviously torn from the notebook sitting on his nightstand. The paper crumpled in Matt's hand as he read it over and over, his heart hammering in terror.

Holt—

If you want him alive, come alone.

Sendak.

— — —

Matt spent the next twenty minutes sitting in the front seat of his car, calling everyone he was related to at once, the hastily scrawled note from Sendak crumpling in his hand as he shouted over the phone that they *had* to do something, *now*. His parents were reluctant to let him go by himself, which made sense. Sendak was both an enormously powerful werewolf and a dangerous madman, but Matt feared what they would do to Shiro if he brought backup. There would be no hiding the rest of his pack from Sendak if they came along—even if he was distracted by whatever Matt was doing, his scouts would smell an entire family of werewolves in their territory immediately.

His dad agreed to stay just on the border of Sendak's territory, close enough that they could hear Matt if he started howling. His mother disagreed entirely. She seemed to think they would be better off calling in reinforcements from the other groups of werewolves in the area they were acquainted with, and then descending on Sendak's pack in full force, destroying them and saving Shiro's life in the process.

Ordinarily, Colleen Holt's word was law; she was considered a leader by all of the wolves in the area, her own family in particular. But Matt knew Shiro couldn't wait that long. In the time it took for their reinforcements to arrive, they could lose him, and Matt couldn't let that happen. He supposed it was an unusual amount of attachment to somebody he'd only known for a few days, but this was the man who had taken Matt into his home without question, and who had still wanted to get to know him after he found out what Matt truly was.

Humans, in his experience, tended to stop speaking to him as soon as they found out about the werewolf thing. In some cases, there was some outright hostility mixed in, but not here. Shiro had accepted it instead, and it made Matt want to do whatever he could to save him.

And on top of it all, Matt knew what Sendak was, knew what he could do, and he was terrified to see something like that happen to Shiro.

So, although a part of him felt like he was making an enormous, life-risking mistake, he ignored his mom's plans for the first time and drove until there was no more road into the deep woods where Sendak's pack resided.

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Matt made it through their borders unharmed, but he could smell the other wolves prowling the territory, acting as lookouts for Sendak. If he had brought anyone else with him, those wolves would have emerged from the shadows where they hid.

He closed in on Sendak's territory in human form, even though he knew all of the Galra would be in that strange, half-shifted form they could take. It made them look more like illustrations of werewolves in fairy tales. In the enormous, snarling monster sort of way.

Sendak's territory wasn't difficult to navigate, even on two legs, with only the light of the moon filtering through the canopy to guide him. It wasn't for good reason. The Galra would have been better hidden if they hadn't dragged a human prisoner through the forest. Matt would have preferred not to have to follow the scent of blood (they hurt him already, they could still

be hurting him, Sendak said he would be alive but for how long), but it meant he only had a short run through the forest before the trail started to descend into the gorge where Sendak and the Galra had made their camp.

The trees became so thick overhead that the moonlight was almost entirely blocked out, but the entrance to the massive network of caves the Galra occupied was filled with an eerie purple light. A ledge hung over the cave's entrance, and proved Matt had to go no further, because Sendak himself was crouched on the outcropping. Shit. Matt forgot how big he was.

He had only seen Sendak once, when the Galra tried to compete with the local werewolf population and were restricted to this area of the forest, but he remembered him as a towering figure, covered in dark gray fur that looked almost violet in this lighting. His eyes were bright gold and glowing unnaturally, another characteristic of his unnatural heritage, and one of them was cut through with a jagged scar.

As Matt approached, Sendak grinned at him, showing off an impressive array of sharp teeth. He leapt from the ledge, landing not two feet from Matt, well within lunging distance, and Matt couldn't keep himself from taking a hesitant step back. Sendak drew himself to his full height, looming over Matt, nearly twice his height, his vicious claws curling across the whole of Matt's face. His entire head could fit in Sendak's palm, and Matt shuddered, because if this came to blows, he have a very slim chance of survival.



"So you actually obeyed my orders," Sendak said, his voice a preternatural growl, half-animal like the rest of him. "Pity. I would have enjoyed ripping your entire pack to shreds, but I suppose I will have to contend myself with you alone."

"Where is he?" Matt said, his voice sounding firmer than he thought it would, all things considered.

"Oh, the human?" Sendak asked, his grin widening to show off yellowed molars. Matt could smell the blood on his claws. "You do not need to concern yourself with him."

"The hell I do! I came for him, give him to me!" He had never felt more like a tiny purse dog yapping at a wolf that could eat him in one bite.

"You don't think I will simply return him to you unharmed in return for this feat of bravery, do you?" Sendak cocked his head to the side like a hound listening to a dog-whistle, but with far more amusement on his features. "Holt. Do you know how Galra are made?"

"I assume it involves some biting," Matt said. Ordinary werewolves like himself had the power to turn humans, but it drained them, weakened their power for a considerable amount of time. It was much more convenient to make more werewolves in the familial sort of way, but turning happened. Matt's father had chosen to be turned by his mother, after all.

"You aren't wrong," Sendak said, "but the Galra have more power than you mongrels because we draw on ancient magic, the source from which our kind were first born, to add to our numbers." He looked skyward, to the moon overhead, just barely visible.

"I don't care," Matt said, although a part of him would have been curious under less life or death circumstances. "*Where is Shiro?*"

"He still lives," Sendak said, "and you can keep him that way, provided you choose correctly. Join us, let us give you the power of the Galra so that you too may serve the Emperor, and we will set him free."

"No. I... why would you want *me*?"

"Because the Emperor finds you useful," Sendak said. He spoke as though he was explaining to a child. "Your family has controlled this territory for centuries—having one of you on our side would be beneficial."

"I'm not—I won't be on *your side*." Matt's mouth tasted bitter, and his hands curled into fists. He tried to breathe, to catch Shiro's scent, but it just smelled overwhelmingly like Galra, and Matt couldn't pick him out.

"You had better decide fast, Holt. He doesn't have long." Sendak looked toward the mouth of the cave. "I wonder if he's even still breathing," he

said, fake sympathy dripping from his voice.

"What did you do to him!?" Matt rarely got his angry, but now, he could practically feel his hackles raising. If he could just channel that energy, use it to fuel his transformation, become something that could take on Sendak...

Although, no form Matt could take would be large enough to face down this literal monster and win.

Even though Matt's larger form was upwards of a hundred-fifty pounds of muscle and fur, most reminiscent of dogs humans bred to fight bears, Sendak was already as large as him, and getting larger. When he shifted fully, he looked like a wolf, but he was about the size of a wolf and a half, with enormous paws sporting claws the size of kitchen knives. Matt's growl sounded like a whimper next to Sendak's vicious snarl, but Matt was glad Sendak took the time to growl at him, because it allowed him to duck to the side, around Sendak, and sprint for the caves.

Matt knew that if he got in far enough, the tunnels would logically have to become smaller, and eventually, he hoped, he could get Shiro to a place where Sendak couldn't fit to catch them. Matt wasn't really sure what the plan was from there, especially considering the other Galra around, who probably weren't as ridiculously oversized as Sendak, but he didn't cross that bridge, because he didn't even come to it.

Before Matt could make it inside the cave, Sendak's full weight landed on him, pressing him into the dirt, his huge, open mouth snapping at Matt's neck like a predator about to take a bite. Matt kicked and squirmed, trying to escape, trying to force Sendak into a position where he could reach anything to bite and force Sendak to loosen his hold, but the claws just dug in.

All at once, a chorus of howls rang out around the forest, and Matt couldn't help but whimper, because he knew what they were. Sendak's wolves, about to surround him a dozen to one, and tear him to shreds. Sendak lifted his head, victoriously howling back, and out of the corner of his eye, Matt

could see a group of Galra emerging from the forest, eyes bright yellow in the dark.

Matt didn't entirely understand Galra body language, but he was pretty sure they had just said "let us at him" to Sendak, who just barely loosened his hold on Matt. Not enough that Matt could move, of course. Even if Sendak did release him entirely, Matt wasn't sure he would be able to stand.

The Galra's eyes seemed brighter and brighter in the dimness around him, and when he noticed that, Matt squirmed in fear, because this was it. This was the magic they were going to use to make Matt one of them, so that they could turn him on his family, force him to serve that beast they called an Emperor.

Matt didn't expect two of them to start running, one peeling off to either side of Sendak, rushing past him and into the cave. Sendak, who seemed to realize what was happening, growled and dug his claws into Matt again, deep enough to cut him open this time. Matt howled in pain, but it only made Sendak press harder. He could feel Sendak's humid breath at the back of his neck, but before Sendak managed to bite him, there was a flurry of movement, then more pain, because Sendak was huge, and sure, him being knocked over was... good?

But now he was *on top of Matt*, who really wasn't meant to hold up an oversized werewolf.

Sendak scrambled to his feet again in seconds, and Matt, much more slowly, struggled to right himself, his shoulders searing where there were deep claw marks in his skin, bleeding sluggishly.

The four remaining Galra lunged again, and Matt braced for impact, but they rushed around him, attacking Sendak from all sides, claws raking across his pelt, teeth snapping at his limbs and his ears. Sendak batted one of them away, a light gray wolf with shorter fur, and another doubled down his effort to tear Sendak to pieces.

Matt stared and watched, trying to figure out why Sendak's own pack was attacking him, and the wolf nearest him shifted back to half-human, so that

he could shout at Matt.

"Go! Get the human prisoner out of here!"

Matt didn't need to be told twice.

He couldn't quite run, not with the pain in his shoulders, but he hurried down the cave, in the direction the first two Galra to break away from the pack had gone.

It didn't take him long to find Shiro, because the area they had taken him was illuminated by more of the weird purple light the Galra favored, and there were two Galra crouched over a lump lying on the cavern floor. Matt could smell it immediately—the lump was Shiro, and he was bleeding badly.

"We're not going to be able to get him out of here in time," one of the Galra said, just as Matt ran in, ignoring the fact that he was standing with two Galra, instead trying to figure out how to keep Shiro alive. He had an enormous gash in his side, three claw marks straight through his shirt, and there was another across his nose, his entire face bloody with it.

The other Galra, a woman with two stripes up either side of her face from jaw to cheekbone, looked at Matt. Her eyes were less unnervingly yellow, but it was still enough to make Matt shrink back, tail between his legs. "You. Can you turn him?"

Matt recoiled, and it only made the two Galra look more somber. Although, they always looked overly serious when they were in this half-shifted form.

"He will not survive otherwise," said the man. "One of us could turn him, but then he would be Galra. I assume that as a human, he would prefer the alternative."

Matt didn't even know if he *could* turn somebody. He'd never tried. He knew it was technically possible for any werewolf to do so, but it would be dangerous. Shiro was already in such bad shape, Matt could just as soon kill

him as turn him. Matt could also just as soon get *himself* killed if the drain on his energy was too much.

"He'll die if you stand there and do nothing," said the woman, "are you trying to save him, or not?"

That was what forced Matt into action, in the end.

When Matt looked back on this particular moment in his life, it all sort of blurred. One second, he was cowering in fear, and the next second, his jaws were sinking into Shiro's shoulder, digging so deep he was afraid he'd break off Shiro's other arm. Something felt... off. Different. Matt didn't ever think that having somebody's blood filling his mouth and somebody's skin tearing under his teeth would feel *right*, but it did.

Not because he was suddenly discovering some cannibalistic tendencies, but because he could feel the magic working, could feel the shift even though Shiro, physically, looked exactly the same.

Well, there was one major difference.

The force of the wolf's blood running through his body, reshaping his DNA, turning him into something superhuman and entirely unhuman simultaneously, had also turned his hair entirely white.

"Is... is that supposed to happen?" Matt asked, not realizing that he'd shifted back to human form. He felt lightheaded, drained, like he'd just given blood and then stood up too fast. Oh wait. Maybe that was the actual blood loss. The wounds in his shoulders felt even bigger when he was in this form.

The world shrank to pinpoints around him, and then rushed upward, as Matt shifted again, his body naturally taking on the form that took the least amount of energy.

He barely had it in him to move, but he made sure, as the Galra got Shiro out of the woods and into a strange car that Matt couldn't even worry about driving away in, that he was settled in Shiro's arms. That way, when Shiro

woke up, he'd have what was hopefully a comfortingly familiar ball of fluff on his lap.

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Matt woke in an unfamiliar room, lying on what felt like a hospital bed. When he tried to sit up, his chest and shoulders pulled tight, because he was bandaged all across his torso. It took him a second to remember why, but then he flashed back to claws and teeth and Sendak pinning him to the ground, and *Shiro*. Where was Shiro?

He sat bolt upright, which startled the room's other occupant awake. Pidge was curled up on a couch that looked too cozy to belong in a hospital room, and she stood, crossing the room to inspect Matt and make sure he wasn't dying.

"What..." Matt stopped and swallowed, because his mouth was unimaginably dry. "What happened to me?"

"Sendak tried to rip you in half, that's what happened!" If Pidge was this pissed at him for defying all advice and running off into a Galra-occupied part of the forest, he'd hate to know what his mom's reaction was gonna be.

"Okay, yes, I do remember that part," Matt said. "But... what *happened*? Where's Shiro? Who were those Galra people? Why were they helping us?"

"One at a time, man," Pidge said, but she sat on the end of Matt's bed and started answering some questions.

Sendak, apparently, was alive, but had been forced to retreat further into the forest, weakened severely by the fight with the Galra who had saved Matt. They were called the Marmora, and despite their Galra heritage, they didn't serve the emperor, and mostly functioned as spies within Galra territory.

And, if Matt had just *waited* like Colleen told him to, they would have gotten Shiro out themselves, and he never would've gotten his ass kicked by Sendak, and okay, Matt was properly chagrined by that.

Midway through Pidge telling Matt they were currently in the residence of two of the Marmorans, one of whom was a doctor that specialized in treating other werewolves (hence the hospital bed), there was a knock on the already-open door.

Matt's head jerked up and he stared—it was Shiro. His hair was entirely white, like Matt remembered from what bare flashes he had of saving Shiro, of *turning* Shiro. There was a fresh scar across his nose, which was much more advanced in its healing than it would have been if Shiro had remained human. Matt knew, at this point, that he had been out for a few days, but Shiro already wore the scar across his face like it'd been there for a long time.

"You're alright," was the first thing Matt said to him. "I'm sorry," was the second.

Shiro shook his head. "Don't be. You saved my life." He crossed the room and Pidge hopped up, waving goodbye at Matt over her shoulder.

"Yeah, but now you're..."

Shiro shrugged. "I guess I'll just have to have somebody teach me how to be a proper werewolf, then."

"Oh. I should find you somebody. I mean, *I'm* clearly not qualified, I can only be a big dog for like, an hour tops, and turning someone apparently almost killed me."

Shiro sat on the edge of his bed, looking deeply concerned, his hands reaching out to brush Matt's shoulder where his skin ended and the bandages began. "Are you going to be okay?" he asked. As he leaned in, Matt wondered if there were bite marks in his shoulder from where Matt had turned him.

"Yeah, yeah. Don't worry about me." Matt's voice got quieter and quieter, as he lifted a hand to the place Shiro's still rested on his shoulder. Shiro got the hint and took his hand, his fingers intertwining with Matt's.

"We're going to be alright, you know," he said. "Sendak's still out there, but we're together."

"We are," Matt said. Shiro leaned his head against Matt's and Matt flooded with delight, forgetting about his injuries entirely. It didn't matter, because he'd succeeded, Shiro was okay, they were both okay. And when Shiro looked at Matt, there was an inhuman gleam in his eyes that hadn't been there before.

Shiro squeezed Matt's hand, before tipping his head up so he could kiss Matt on the forehead. "You should get some rest," he said, and then made no effort to move.

"One question first," Matt said, "have you tried to shift yet?"

"I haven't managed to, not yet."

Matt grinned. "Good. I want to be there." He settled back into the pillows, scooting over so that Shiro could sit next to him against the head of the bed. "You're gonna be the cutest puppy, Shiro."

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Technically, Matt did miss the first time Shiro shifted. He fell fast asleep with Shiro sitting next to him, Shiro's fingers running through his hair, and he woke up with his face half-pillowed in soft, white fur.

Matt lifted his head just enough to see the shape of Shiro's new dog form curled up next to him, and smiled.

"I was right," he whispered, petting Shiro's head before snuggling in again and drifting back off.



Author's Note:

Big thanks to my artists for creating amazing work for this AU!! And also to everyone who organized the shatt big bang, yall are amazing <3